REMARKS

on the

VERY INFERIOR UTILITY

of

Classical Learning.

BY

W. STEVENSON. (M.) of Manchester.

Manchester,
Printed, for the Author, at the Office of G. Nicholson,
Sold by *H. D. SYMONDS*, 20, Paternoster-row,
LONDON.

1796.

BRITISH MUSEUM

REMARKS, &c.

In the system of education, which is, at present, generally adopted and followed, classical learning holds a distinguished place. It is thought necessary, not only for those, who are designed for the professions of Law, Physic, and Divinity, but for every one, who would boldly claim, or reasonably expect the title and honours of a literary character. It is also made the principal object of study early in life; when our years are the most valuable and improvable: when those treasures of knowledge ought to be collected and arranged, which our common and peculiar situation will demand: when that foundation ought to be laid, on which may afterwards be raised the superstructure of general science; and when a strong, and, commonly, a lasting bias is given towards those studies, to which we direct our attention, and sacrifice our time.

It is, therefore, most undoubtedly, the duty of every parent to enquire with care and impartiality

into the right, which classical learning has to this distinguished place, to so large and valuable a portion of our lives, and to this prescriptive influence and authority. Hitherto it has been too generally exalted and admired, without any conviction of its value and importance, or even examination into its comparative utility. If it really deserve that veneration, which has, hitherto, been paid to it, let it no longer be the veneration of indiscriminating ignorance and implicit faith. Let it hereafter be studied, not because antiquity has sanctioned its study, but because its value is clearly seen and strongly felt.—But, if it should appear to occupy a niche in the temple of science which might be more worthily filled, let it be removed to its proper place. If it should appear that classical learning employs so much, and such a valuable part of the life of man, that other knowledge more necessary and useful is either entirely neglected, or but partially known, surely only the most blind and bigotted attachment will defend the place and time it occupies, or continue the respect it has hitherto received.

No kind of knowledge, whether of facts or words, is entirely useless. From studies, apparently, the most trifling and insignificant, though we should not be enabled to multiply or arrange our ideas; we may frequently be led to consider parts of other sciences in a light we before had never perceived, or at least, rendered capable of expressing more

fully, precisely and forcibly, ideas already existing and facts already known. As all the matter in the universe appears to be inseparably linked and mutually attractive; and, as no idea exists in the mind unassociated, so knowledge of every kind is connected. He, who spends his time and employs his abilities in tracing the operations of mind, in pointing out the true happiness of man, or in explaining the laws of nature is but a fellow-labourer with him, who, by his study and comparison of different languages facilitates and improves the communication of thought. Of the many different kinds of knowledge, none, therefore, is absolutely useless. But, we must understand their comparative necessity and importance, before we can assign them that time and place, which they merit, in a plan of education.

In order that we may see clearly and feel firmly the ground we are about to tread, it is necessary to state what constitutes the utility of knowledge: or, in other words, to explain the end of education, that we may perceive the connection between the different means employed, and that end. A knowledge of the laws and powers of nature, that they may either be applied to the advantage of man, or prevented from injuring him: a clear and habitual perception of the consequences of actions, which constitutes the firm and proper foundation of all duty: and a thorough acquaintance with the force and appropriate meaning of words, phrases, and

sentences, by which our ideas may be conveyed; are the ends of a wise system of education. Or, more concisely, education should be conducted in such a manner, as to produce the knowledge of facts; the habit of thence deducing rules of judgment and conduct; and the ability to communicate and receive information. However mankind may differ respecting the nature of their happiness, all will admit, that, before happiness can be pursued it must be known; that knowledge, arising from individual and uncompared experience and observation, is trifling and limited, and that words are the only medium of thought. From these observations, it follows, that an acquaintance with facts and principles is of the first importance and utility, and that a knowledge of words, which do not serve either directly or indirectly to make our communications more exact, impressive and lasting is neither valuable nor desirable.

The study of classical literature, therefore, if, by means of it, we gain merely a greater number of words to express the same idea, is, comparatively, of very little use: if these words enable us to express the same idea more clearly or forcibly, its importance is still but secondary and relative. Its claim to the first rank must depend upon the valuable truths, which cannot be attained, except we understand the languages of Greece and Rome.

As all general truths and first principles depend

for their evidence upon the number and variety of facts, it is plain that all works of science in modern times must be more perfect than any antiquity could produce. If the foundation of morals be the will and authority of the Deity, it is useless and absurd to have recourse to Epictetus, Xenophon, Seneca, or Cicero, for the rule of duty and the means of happiness: if morality be nothing, but principles of conduct founded upon a knowledge of the consequences of different actions, this science must be improved in proportion to the number and variety of facts, and the simple and general nature of the truths deduced from a comparison of them*.

* It has been observed by the admirers of antiquity, that many of the discoveries in science, to which modern times have laid claim, are to be found in the writings of the Greek and Roman philosophers. The disciples of Aristotle and Zeno are said to have advanced the doctrine of the origin of ideas, which Locke, according to general belief, first suggested and defended. The former philosophers maintained that the motion of heavy bodies towards the centre was accelerated. Even Newton must yield the crown of philosophy to Anaxagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and Lucretius, who are said, by the admirers of antiquity, plainly to indicate the principle of gravitation, and the centripetal and centrifugal forces. The animalcules of Lewenhoëk were conjectured by Plato, Hippocrates, and Aristotle.

It is not surprising that men, who, in general, were remarkable for a creative imagination, and who constantly indulged themselves in forming conjectures, should sometimes, amidst a multiplicity of error and absurdity, produce a sublime and important truth. But what they advance is mere hypothesis; and, till modern times had by reasoning and experiment separated truth from error, every thing they conjectured was worthy of nearly equal belief. Opinions, till they are known to be either supported by facts, or deducible

Works of taste, which result from certain feelings, and appeal to correspondent and similar feelings, not depending upon an acquaintance with facts, may be as perfect, when first produced, as after the lapse of two thousand years. The critical works of Greece and Rome, where they attempt to regulate those feelings, and to explain their effects, but do not enter into disquisitions respecting the operations of the mind, stand high in this branch of literature.

But I must confess, if imagery apposite, beautiful, and bold, constitute the essence of Poetry, modern times may boast of productions more truly poetic than any found in the languages we are now considering. However, allowing the poetry of the ancients the merit generally attributed to it; if the preceding observations be true, the Greek and Latin classics must be studied, not in order to encrease our knowledge of nature and of

deducible from them, tend very little to the advancement of knowledge. They are either entirely disregarded, or taken for granted merely from the influence of authority and prejudice, on neither of which ought the principles of natural or moral science to depend for their admission into our creed or their regulation of our conduct. Admitting, that the knowledge of many of the philosophers is extensive and their morality pure, if we consider the period, in which they lived; this circumstance should not lead us to devote much time to the perusal of their writings. We may be astonished at the fact: so we are at the productions of premature genius. But the real merit and utility of a writer depends upon the information he conveys. It is absurd therefore to contend, that we ought to study the philosophy and morals of the ancients, because, considering the time, in which they lived, the advances they made are extraordinary and unparalleled.

mind, or of the principles of morality and the means of happiness; but, that we may taste in their true relish, feel in their full force, and see in all their beauty, productions, which afford but a momentary pleasure, and which weaken the mind, while they interest and strengthen the imagination.

But the advocate for classical learning advances, and triumphantly asks for historians in modern times equal to Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Sallust, Tacitus, and Livy.—The utility of history has, in my opinion, been much exaggerated. Little real information can be gained, especially from the history of those times, which are remote, and of those people, who are different from us in manners, opinion, and conduct. Modern history appears to be more useful: because the truths deducible from it are more easily and generally applicable to events of our own time. But from the histories of any nation or any period, what truths not generally admitted, can be inferred; or, which, if they be denied, may not be proved from events of great notoriety and common occurrence. By much the greater part of history is filled with the narration of battles. And what connection is there between human duty and all the circumstances and particulars of the murders of ambition? The memory alone can be exercised in the reading of history; for the judgment is soon tired with drawing inferences already allowed. And the exclusive exercise of the memory is too much the object and

the effect of the present mode of education. Even biography, as it has a strong tendency to bring us under the influence of emulation and example, is exceptionable.—But, omitting any farther remarks respecting the utility of history, let us boldly, but candidly, enquire, whether the historians of Greece and Rome owe their fame to their own merits, or to the implicit belief and the prejudices of mankind. That they have, hitherto, been highly admired, is no proof of their worth, so decisive and strong, as to preclude and render unnecessary all enquiry into their claims.

If Herodotus believed all he wrote, we must condemn him for his credulity; a fault, from which every historian ought to be free: if he did not, he discovers a great want of judgment in mixing what is fabulous and absurd with what is true. None have ever questioned the impartiality of Thucydides, or denied the authenticity of his narration. But he has been censured for the choice of his subject. He seems also blameable for sacrificing the connection and completeness of the narrative to the injudicious and fanciful division of his history into winters and summers. Thus the scene is continually shifted: and the reader, in the midst of an important or interesting transaction, is suddenly transported from Asia to Peloponnesus, or from the walls of Syracuse to the coast of Corcyra. The character of Xenophon, as an historian, must depend upon his *Anabasis*. His *Cyropædia* is a ro-

mance, rendered in many parts tedious and disgusting by the puerility of the narration and the length, frequency and frivolous nature of the speeches it contains. His *Hellenica* have never been brought forward by the advocates for classical learning as a proof of his abilities in writing history. The simplicity of nature adorns the narrative of his *Anabasis*. But the partiality of friendship appears to have directed his pen, where he describes the character and relates the actions of Cyrus the younger. All the proud bigotry of a Greek manifests itself, where he contrasts the prudence and skill of his countrymen, with the cowardly indolence of the Persians. The character of Sallust, as an historian, will suffer, when we recollect, that his enmity to Cicero is visible in the account he gives of Cataline's conspiracy. Many ineffectual attempts have been made to point out even the most distant and slight connection between his narrative, and the observations and reflections he has prefixed. Livy, in the earlier parts of his history, must plead guilty to the charge either of credulity, or want of judgment. To Tacitus must be given a large tribute of applause: but for the greater part of his fame he is indebted to the knowledge of human nature, which he discovers, and the pertinent and deep reflections which he makes. All the historians of antiquity, and particularly those of Greece, manifest a strong partiality for their own country, and a su-

preme contempt for other nations*. The most celebrated historians of Greece and Rome introduce long and tedious harangues. The business of an historian is to relate with impartiality, in proper order and connection, and in correct, simple, and forcible language, the facts and events of the time. When he deviates from the track of history, into the paths of observation and reflection, he strays from his proper object. He should leave the motives and characters to be inferred from the actions performed, and not confuse or bias the mind of the reader, by ascribing motives of his own suggestion, and orations of his own study. In that case he ceases to be an historian. He assumes a different character. The motives he assigns may discover an intimate knowledge of the human mind, and very satisfactorily account for the actions performed: the speeches may be very appropriate, and replete with beautiful sentiments, or deep reflections; but they occupy a

* It is very surprising, that the historical records of Persia, from the year 610 before Christ to the Macedonian conquest, during which time happened the famous battles of Marathon, Thermopylæ, Salamis, and Platæa, according to the Greek historians, bear not the least resemblance even in the great outlines and leading facts, to the history of the Persians as related by the Greeks. I do not mean to insinuate, that such battles did not happen and terminate as the Greek historians relate; but certainly the fact I have mentioned should lead us to suspect the impartiality of historians, who lived in nations, where individual and national vanity was not regarded as criminal, and at a time, when the falsehood and exaggeration, to which it gave birth, would not be pointed out and corrected.

place to which they have no title. The style of each of the historians we have been considering is excellent in its kind: and their claim to a continuance of part of the admiration, they have hitherto received, should rest on the manner in which their narration is told, rather than on its truth and impartiality. But we shall, hereafter, enquire, whether any advantage may be derived from studying the style of the ancients; and, if there may, whether it will compensate for the time, which must necessarily be employed, before the beauties of their style can be perceived and imitated.

Whether the preceding observations be true and decisive or not, it is very obvious, that, if the ancient writers be worthy of perusal on account of the matter they contain, the translations of them into our own language will supply us with that matter. To this it is generally replied, that no translation can convey the beauty, energy, and appropriateness of the originals, which to perceive and feel, a person must be conversant in the languages of Greece and Rome. That this is desirable, if it would increase our pleasure, or improve our taste, all will allow; but, is not the sacrifice of several of the most valuable and improvable years of our lives too great, that we may be enabled merely to distinguish different shades of meaning, and to perceive and embody in words beauties evanescent, and, perhaps, ideal? The facts, opinions, and reasonings

of antiquity, may be translated into the languages of modern nations with sufficient accuracy and clearness. The essence of poetry consists not in words: it is, therefore, not dependant upon them. Surely it is improper and criminal to devote several years to a study, whence the mind receives no knowledge, and the imagination but little pleasure. It cannot improve, because it does not exercise, the judgment.—Classical literature, therefore, is not an effectual mean to the most important ends of education,—the knowledge of facts, and the deduction of simple and useful truths. This, most probably, its advocates will contend, they never maintained; but though, perhaps, it has never been maintained in words, does not the length of time, generally devoted to the study of the classics, either suppose it, or discover a culpable and dangerous devotedness to the influence of custom? A plain statement of facts, perhaps, may more forcibly arrest the attention, and lead to more close examination, than any reasoning on the subject. The greater part of seven years is generally devoted, almost exclusively, to the study of Greek and Latin. This forms a large portion of that part of our lives, in which we are capable of forming just opinions, and of gaining useful knowledge. And what in reality is received into the mind during this time? Either no facts, no general principles, no acquaintance with the laws and powers of nature and of mind, no perception

of the basis, no conviction of the obligations, of morality; or such, as might have been gained in much less time, and to much greater perfection, from modern publications *.

The other object I mentioned, as necessary to be kept in view, in a plan of education, is such a knowledge and command of language, as will enable us to convey our ideas with precision, elegance, and energy. An acquaintance with the classics of antiquity is said to be necessary, or, at least, very useful, in order to accomplish this object. It cannot be denied, that, before there were any classical productions in our own language, the Greek and Latin authors might, with propriety and advantage, be read; as they would form and purify the taste, by exhibiting models of the different kinds of style. But it appears to me, that *now* an Englishman will improve his style with more ease, and to an higher degree of correctness, purity, precision, elegance, and force, by studying the best authors in his own language, than by wasting the midnight oil in close and long applica-

* Admitting the truth of what is frequently asserted, that facts and reasonings are remembered more exactly, when they have been received into the mind through the medium of a foreign language, why should we spend our time in learning to read books, which contain little worthy of being remembered?—But is not the fact thus, that the truths we gain from reading the classics are better remembered, because more time and attention have been given? If it be, let equal time and attention be given to English authors, and what they contain will be equally well remembered.

tion to the volumes of antiquity. Clearness and boldness of conception will generally command a perspicuous and animated style. If any thing else be wanting, it is a knowledge of the language, in which the person is writing. If it be asserted, that we have no authors comparable, in point of style, to the Greek and Latin classics; is it not probable, since many have made the writers of antiquity their close study, in order to discover and imitate their peculiar excellencies, that our language will not admit of that simplicity, elegance, and force, which are admired in Herodotus, Livy, Thucydides, and Tacitus? Till it can be shewn, that our language will admit of a style superior to that of our best classics; and, if that be the fact, that a critical knowledge of Greek and Latin will advance our style nearer to perfection, we must be excused for *simply* imagining, that to understand and write English well, we must study *it*, and not any other language *.

* Nothing has retarded the progress of science more, than the blind deference which is yet, in some instances, paid to the Greek and Latin authors. While Aristotle was *canonized*, an appeal to his sentiments silenced every doubt and gained credit to every absurdity. It is not long since logic was freed from the perplexity and confusion, in which he had involved it. His Poetics are still regarded as needing no alteration and capable of no addition or improvement. Hence, from considering the ancients as having reached that point of perfection, to which no modern can attain, we did in fact with superior advantages long remain unequal to them. The same observations will apply to style. Modern authors, taking it for granted, that the languages, in which they wrote, would not admit of a style equal

Besides, is it not reasonable to suppose, that the oldest English classics are indebted for their manner of expressing their thoughts, not so much to their acquaintance with the Greek and Latin authors, as to that study and knowledge of their own tongue, which in their time was commonly confined to those, who were proficients in general literature? At present there are few productions, in which the style is not, at least, smooth, and generally correct. Is it not most natural to account for this fact by supposing, what enquiry and observation will confirm, that our own language is now more studied, and better understood? Formerly, if a person were unacquainted with the grammars of Greece and Rome, he had little or no acquaintance with that of his own tongue. No person thought of studying the nature and genius of the English language, who had not made some proficiency in the languages of antiquity. It is no wonder, therefore, if the style of those, who were not classical scholars, is incorrect, negligent, and

equal to that of the antient classics, comforted and excused themselves with the belief, that the imperfections in their style were attributable to the language, and not to their own want of capacity, knowledge or attention. One principal reason, why the style of the Greek authors is superior to that of the Latin, and of both to the style, in which many modern authors write, seems to be, that the Greeks studied no language but their own, while the Romans studied the Greek, and modern nations study both the Greek and Latin.—See some observations on this subject, pertinent and judicious, expressed with the concise energy of Thomas Paine. *Age of Reason*, part 1, page 31—33.

uncouth. That want of precision and smoothness is, generally, accompanied, in their style, with grammatical errors, plainly proves that *those* faults are attributable rather to an ignorance of their own tongue than to any deficiency in classical knowledge.

Surely nothing can be so absurd as to suppose that Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, or Terence, must be studied, in order that we may be acquainted with the phrases and idioms of the English tongue: and without a perfect acquaintance with them our style must be obscure and destitute of precision. This the most hardy advocate for classical learning will hesitate to assert; but he will contend, that, as many of the English words are derived from the Greek and Latin, the knowledge of these languages is necessary, in order to feel the full force, and perceive the exact meaning of such words. But, if we carefully examine into the current and common meaning of words derived from the Latin, (for there are few from the Greek in common use) we shall find that many of them, if employed according to the strictness of their etymology, would convey ideas very different from those attached to them by general consent, and established custom. Besides, such words, when made part of the English language, have many different significations, which we shall learn much sooner, and more exactly, by reading the books where they are used, and consulting English dic-

tionaries, than by examining into their primary and etymological meaning. Greek words are frequently used, with an English termination, in works of science. In general they are compound words. And, though a person, acquainted with the signification of the single words in the original language, may pronounce them more critically and remember them with greater ease, surely these objects are not of such importance, as to justify the devoting of several years to obtain them. If the words in the English language, derived from the Greek and Latin, preserve their original meaning; what that meaning is may be known by studying those English authors, whose style is the most pure: if the meaning be altered, it is of no use to have recourse to the original terms. All words are arbitrary symbols. Their meaning is frequently changed. It is absurd, therefore, to go back two thousand years to know the meaning of a word in present use.

In order to understand the philosophy and principles of universal grammar, the study and comparison of several languages is absolutely necessary. The Greek and Latin are supposed to hold a distinguished rank in this respect, because their grammars are plain and simple. Yet, if the principles of grammar and language, explained and illustrated in the "*Diversions of Purley*," be founded in truth; to understand the philosophy of this branch of science, we should study those tongues,

which are in their most simple and natural state, and in which the fewest indeclinable words have been produced by a regard to the secondary use of language, the expression of ideas with conciseness and ease. The Greek and Latin are too perfect and too far removed from their original elements, with which we have very little acquaintance, to be of much use in pointing out the origin, tracing the progress, and explaining the fundamental principles of language. In the northern tongues, we may discover many words in their primitive state of verbs or nouns, which we, with very little alteration, use as indeclinable parts of speech. To be able to understand and explain the philosophy of grammar, it seems necessary to take that language, with the original meaning, state, and derivation of whose words we are the best acquainted. If these observations be true, the knowledge of our own tongue, illustrated by the Gothic, Saxon, German, Swedish, and Danske, will be sufficient to produce a grammar founded on philosophical and general principles.* The Greek and Latin may be of use to confirm, explain, and correct, so far as we can point out the

* The "Diversions of Purley," compared with the "Hermes of Harris," will point out the improvements in the theory of language, which a mind not shackled and darkened by Greek and Latin, has made. Whom may we thank for the pompous and systematic nonsense contained in the "Philosophical Arrangements," but Aristotle, and his commentators?

original meaning and state of their indeclinable words.*

* In support of the opinion, that many important advantages are gained by the study of different languages, it has been said, that "persons, who have learnt only their native tongue, distinguish the parts of speech with great difficulty and uncertainty, for want of attending to the different kinds of ideas which they represent.*" Though this observation does not exclusively or directly apply to the subject of these pages, it will not be improper or useless to consider and examine it.

The author of this observation proceeds. "For instance, a person of a good understanding, ignorant of every language but his own, will distinguish an *adjective*, by its admitting *man* or *thing* after it; and not by considering that an *adjective* is a property." But is it not plain that, if such a person had been taught his native grammar, and understood and remembered the definition and explanation there given of an *adjective*, he would have had as clear ideas, and expressed himself as philosophically, as if he had studied and understood all the ancient and modern languages?

I shall next examine some facts, which are said to demonstrate the unspeakable advantage of the study of different languages.† "How many of the absurdities of the Greek philosophers of all sects are we now able to trace up to verbal analogies? The Latin tongue was too near the Greek to be of much service to the Romans in this respect. How many of those controversies in Christianity, which arose before the propagation of learning in the west, are, at the bottom, merely verbal? How many were exploded upon the first revival of learning, and the study of languages? and how many are still exploded by the same means at this day? To appearance, the study of different languages is an affair of *words* only; but these words are, more closely than men imagine, connected with *things*, and things of considerable consequence." The reason that the absurdities of the Greek philosophers prevailed so long, and to such an extent, seems to have been, that more stress was laid upon words, than facts and ideas. If an intimate acquaintance with the language, in which these absurdities were delivered, alone were necessary to destroy their prevalence, certainly at the very time they were first brought forward, they would have been either entirely

* Priestley's Lectures on the Theory of Language.
† Priestley, ibid.

It appears, then, that classical learning is not of that importance, which is generally imagined, even

entirely neglected or openly confuted. This confutation and consequent disbelief and neglect was reserved for those times, in which, with a less intimate and critical knowledge of the Greek language, mankind were anxious to know the meaning of words, before they committed them to memory, and the evidence for assertions and opinions, before they received them into their creed. Thus by an attention to science, and by the exercise of the judgment, not by the study of words and languages, verbal absurdities and controversies were banished from the school of philosophy. Hence we may justly range the above-mentioned facts on the side of science, and oppose them to the advocates for the study of languages.

I shall conclude this long note with an examination of the following observations. "The study of languages is not without its use. If it be properly pursued, it strengthens the capacities of the mind, and enlarges our experience; and the comparison of different languages together, with just critical remarks on their general agreement to the nature of things, and the powers of the human mind, and the peculiarities observable in each, besides the entertainments it will afford to a curious observer, may prove the means of enriching our native tongue with that copiousness and variety, which will enable us to deliver our sentiments on all subjects with a superior strength and elegance.

And not to insist upon it, that languages are usually acquired at an age, when nothing else almost can be learned; it may be added, if the experience and observation of other nations be worth any thing, it is very desirable, where we cannot collect them for ourselves, to take them from the words of the original authors."*

The study of languages can strengthen only the memory, at the expence of much time, and commonly to the detriment of the judgment. Mere language cannot enlarge the experience: it must be enlarged by an acquaintance with facts, which will be very limited, if we sacrifice our time to the study of words, or if our knowledge must come through the medium of more than one language. If languages must be studied merely for the entertainment a comparison of them will

* "The Importance of Learning;" a Sermon, by the Rev. Philip Holland.

when we consider only the secondary and inferior object of education, the knowledge and command of language. Let as much time and attention be given to the study of the English grammar and language, as ~~is~~ now, generally, devoted to the grammars and authors of antiquity; and the style of our writers will be more pure, correct, and energetic: the formal affectation of foreign words and idioms will no longer pollute and obscure it: Greek and Latin quotations, which, most commonly, are introduced, not because they contain any novelty

will afford, they should be deferred, till useful and important knowledge be gained. New words are not desirable, till new facts are discovered, or new combinations of ideas formed. Then it would be more proper to conform to the analogy of our own tongue, than to introduce words not more expressive.* Whence does it happen, that most modern languages are inferior to the Greek and Latin in copiousness and exact nicety of meaning, but from this circumstance that no modern nation attempts to improve ~~their~~ own tongue by studying its nature and principles, by simplifying its rules and by fixing and distinguishing the meaning of words, generally deemed synonymous? By such means a language would be more improved in every respect, than by the introduction of foreign words.

Of the two observations contained in the latter paragraph, the former will hereafter be considered; the other would be a sufficient reason to study the languages of those nations, from whom we should, most probably, gain the most knowledge, if it were not the fact, that all works of science, and argument are soon translated with sufficient accuracy and faithfulness.

* Science would be more generally and rapidly extended, if the words peculiar to each branch of it were formed from the language of the country. The peculiar terms and the new facts of each science might be expressed by single words used in common language, many of which might be found, sufficiently exact and clear, or by compound words, or, where neither of these methods could be adopted, by more than one word. Thus more real advantage would be gained, because knowledge would be more open to all, than by making the language of science common to the learned of all countries, which, in fact, is confining it to them.

of remark, solidity of observation, or beauty of sentiment, but merely because they are in an unknown tongue, will be banished. Such quotations either contain something applicable to the subject, or they do not; if they do, it savours of the craft or pedantry of learning, not to translate them: if they do not, or if the matter they contain be trifling or trite, they are improper and useless.

We have, hitherto, been considering the utility of classical learning, only as an object of general education. It cannot be denied, that it is of some use to those designed for the professions. But, certainly, a very moderate acquaintance with Latin is sufficient both for Law and Physic. If persons, intended for these professions, be able to read with ease the modern publications in their respective branches, a more intimate and critical knowledge of the classics ought neither to be obtained nor desired, till they have perfected the study of every science, in the least connected with their own. That such small advances, and so few improvements have been made, comparatively speaking, in medicine, in the professors of which an extensive and minute knowledge of Greek and Latin is thought necessary, may, partly, be attributed to their habits having been early formed more to the study of words, than to the observation of facts; and from their time being employed more in searching for authorities, than

in establishing and simplifying general truths. Even in the study of Divinity, classical learning has, in my opinion, too high a place. To obtain a knowledge of the principles of the human mind; of the different manners, habits, and pursuits of men; of their hopes, and their fears; of the errors of their understanding, and the consequent vices of their conduct;—to apply proper arguments and motives, from an acquaintance with the foundation and constituent parts of morality, joined to a knowledge of the error to be removed, and the vice to be corrected;—is of the first importance in the character of a divine, and therefore should be the first and principal object of his education and study. A preacher of Christianity ought certainly to be well acquainted with the historical evidence, on which it rests. But this evidence is so amply detailed by English authors, whose correctness and fidelity not even the Deists will deny, that the study and knowledge of them will be sufficient to qualify him for a defender of his religion. It is contended, that a minister of the gospel should be able to read, in their originals, the books which contain the historical evidence. But, might not the time, necessary to attain this ability, be better employed? No one will contend, because it is desirable, that the professional advocate for Christianity should be able to prove the genuineness and authenticity of the volumes which contain and support his religion; that,

therefore, he ought to employ his time in the examination and comparison of different manuscripts, editions, translations, and versions. I much question, whether to be able to understand and explain the scriptures critically, and to point out the exact meaning of every word and phrase, be worthy the sacrifice of so much time, as must necessarily be employed. The object of a divine should be to make men Christians in faith and practice: let then the studies of a divine rank according to the intimacy of their connection with that object.

We now come to the attack of those arguments, with which, in his last retreat, the defender of classical learning, fortifies himself: that the years devoted to the writers of Greece and Rome are too tender for the study of any science: that then the memory ought to be strengthened by exercise and use: that to learn the grammars and the words of languages, which at the same time affords pleasure and improvement, is an employment the most proper, because the best adapted, and the most beneficial, to the early years of life.—But would not the facts of nature, whence might afterwards be deduced her laws and the principles of science, be remembered in youth better than dry words? would they not afford more pleasure? would they not more strengthen the judgment, and enlarge the comprehension, while they equally exercised and improved the memory? would they not be

much more useful in future life?—Nothing impairs the judgment more, than overloading the memory. Such conduct is sacrificing the end to the means. For of what use are facts, except that from them we may draw rules of conduct and judgment? It is commonly imagined, that the memory in youth outruns the judgment many years. This, I believe, will be found not to be naturally the case. But the mode of education gives the one a great advantage over the other. Would it not, therefore, be more suitable to the inclinations of youth, and more conducive to their future knowledge and usefulness, to make them early acquainted with the leading and striking facts of natural history and philosophy? none of which would be dry and uninteresting, or perfectly inexplicable to children, much sooner than is generally imagined. The explanation, however, might be deferred, till a number were pointed out and remembered; as, then, they would illustrate and explain each other. Children would soon begin, even of themselves, to compare these facts, and thence to infer their common properties, and the laws and powers of nature. Whereas mere words cannot, till more advanced years, be made the object of philosophical investigation. A person will begin to understand the general laws of nature more early in life, than the first principles of language. In the study of facts, therefore, both the judgment and the memory are exercised and

improved:—in the study of words, only the memory.

It is certain, that a knowledge of natural history and philosophy, in all their branches, even though it were superficial, would be of much more use in every situation of life, than an acquaintance with the classics. Indeed, the advocates for the latter contend, principally, that they afford pleasure in the perusal: but, is this selfish, momentary, insulated pleasure, to be compared with that pleasure, and those advantages, derivable from the study of nature, which we can enjoy ourselves, and communicate to others? A mere classical scholar is not, by his knowledge, connected with the world. Whereas every branch of natural science is to him, acquainted with it, a link, which connects him with his fellow-men.

But, let us meet the arguments more directly, and consider them more attentively. In the first place, it may be observed, that no proof can be adduced, that the years devoted to classical learning, are too tender for the study of philosophy: no trial has yet been made; or if made, we have not been informed of the mode in which it was conducted, and the result which it produced. There is a strong probability that children would learn the most striking and important facts of nature, and the common and first principles of science, with more pleasure, readiness, and advantage, than they, in general, learn the grammars and words of Greece

and Rome. Secondly, the early study of philosophy would be productive of all the good effects, which can possibly proceed from the present plan of education; while it would be free from all the disadvantages. The memory would be strengthened: while, at the same time, the judgment would be rendered solid, and the apprehension quick. A child would not be able to walk abroad, without perceiving in the works of nature and art, the facts and principles illustrated, which he was learning at school. Whereas books alone can encrease or confirm the knowledge of the classical scholar. Lastly, it may be observed, that few children make any great advances in the ancient languages; that even those who do, generally omit the study of them, when they are settled in life; and that the greatest additions to human knowledge and happiness have been made by proficients in natural or moral philosophy.

If there be any reason for the present mode of education, it must be one of the following: that the most useful knowledge is gained by studying the classics in their original languages; this we have already proved to be weak and insufficient: that the languages of Greece and Rome afford much amusement and pleasure; allowing the truth of this assertion, studies, which merely supply amusement, ought not to occupy the time and place of important and useful science: that the years devoted to the classics cannot be otherwise em-

ployed; the contrary appears probable; children would remember facts with more ease and pleasure than dry words: or, lastly, that, even after several years have been spent in reading the Greek and Roman authors, sufficient time remains for the obtainment of every necessary branch of knowledge; this is not the fact; every person will be useful, independent, and happy, in proportion to the extent and accuracy of his knowledge:—but might it not be retorted upon those, who urge this argument, that, after the elements of the sciences have been taught, sufficient time would remain for the *necessary* study of the classics?—The bad effects which, generally, result from the present system of education are the following: an overgrown memory, and a weak and puny judgment: a blind and bigotted attachment to authorities, names, and antiquity: disputes merely verbal: and, consequently, the continuance of error and prejudice. If we farther consider what discoveries and improvements might have been made, if the time and talents of the principal classical scholars had been devoted to science, we shall, from strong conviction, and the ardent love of truth and happiness, endeavour to dispel the mist of prejudice, through which the utility of classical literature has, generally, been viewed.

It would be deviating too far from the professed and immediate object of this essay, to give a regular and systematic plan of education, in which every branch of knowledge, grammatical, natural,

and moral, should have its appropriate and just rank. It would be no difficult task to fill up the years, which are now *wasted* in Greek and Latin. I shall mention some of the sciences, from which much useful knowledge may be gained: which, while they instruct, will also amuse: which present facts, that will afford an agreeable relaxation to the mind, after it has been examining into their principles, and discovering their laws.—Let the principles of mechanics be laid down and explained. Let them be applied to the formation and uses of instruments, generally necessary. Then we shall no longer implicitly trust to the skill or honesty of a workman, in their structure or repair. —Chemistry presents her stores of knowledge: she offers assistance to every art: she harmonizes and simplifies nature: she courts the admiration and the study of all, for whom novelty has any charms.—In order that we may be able to mention, in the languages of antiquity, the several parts of our bodies, shall we employ that time, which might have rendered us familiar with the instructive and useful wonders of anatomy?—Shall the modern writers, and the modern improvements in medicine, be neglected or unknown, that we may read with critical skill the works of Hippocrates or Celsus?—Are the elements of geometry even yet so imperfectly understood, that, where any doubts arise, we must compare the manuscripts, and settle the original text of Euclid?—In addition to nat-

ural philosophy in all its branches, and to anatomy and medicine, let natural history, not less instructive or pleasing, though less generally useful, be studied.

Let children no longer gain their knowledge of morality from detached precepts, or from incidental and unconnected remarks. Let their duty no longer rest on the undermined and tottering basis of authority. Let their virtuous actions no longer proceed from the brute sympathy of unenlightening example. But let morality be taught regularly and systematically. Let their good habits be the result of firm conviction. Let the foresight and grasp of their minds enable them to hold in habitual contemplation the remote consequences of every principle of conduct. Let them be rendered capable of tracing to the axioms of the moral science every proposition to which they assent, and every maxim on which they act.—To accelerate and ensure the attainment of these important ends, let the human mind be studied: let the progress of intellect be marked: let these grand truths be rooted in the memory, that man is the necessary creature of original formation and external circumstances; that the laws of the intellectual and moral world are as fixed and regular as those of the natural; that, therefore, knowledge alone is necessary to render the actions of intelligent beings as certainly subservient to the general good, as are, in many instances, the powers of matter.

It may be objected, that the superstructure is too extensive and heavy for the narrow and weak basis of a child's understanding. But, let it be raised by degrees; and every addition to the building will assist nature in settling and strengthening the foundation. Increasing years must fill up that outline of science, which youth has only sketched: but only to sketch it with exactness, and in all its parts, will sufficiently and agreeably occupy that time, which is now reluctantly, because from mere authority, and without any present pleasure, or hope of future advantage, sacrificed to the classics.—A command of implicit obedience and confidence generally silences the enquiries of boys concerning the utility of studying the ancient languages: and little improvement can be made in any study, till either its present pleasure be felt, or its future advantage perceived.

A perfect knowledge of the English grammar and language might be obtained in a fourth part of the time, which the classics now occupy. Very few, at present, possess this. Let, therefore, this be considered in a plan of education as an object of primary importance. Let youth be accustomed to express themselves in conversation and writing, with ease, correctness, precision, elegance, and force. Let it be considered more desirable, honourable, and useful, to write English like Addison, than Latin like Cicero.—For these purposes, the English grammar should be understood; the English

classics should be studied, and English composition should be practised.

These different branches of science, if they were not merely understood in theory, but illustrated and confirmed by observation and practice, would fill up the time usually devoted to the instruction of youth. Thus useful knowledge would be extended; and the probability of improvement and discovery increased. Men would be rendered more social, by the very nature and object of their studies: while at the same time they would become more independent.—Even, if the sciences were to be studied only for the pleasure they afford; surely, to a pure and unbiassed mind, every branch of natural history and philosophy would afford greater pleasure than can be derived from the ability to read, write, and talk the languages of Greece and Rome; or to settle the exact meaning of a passage, which, most probably, contains a common-place observation, or a self-evident truth.

What real title have the authors of antiquity to be preferred to those of France, Italy, and Germany; where works of science and literature are continually appearing, which we may wish or have occasion to peruse, previously to their being translated?*

* In reply to the argument, that a knowledge of Latin is of great utility in studying the French and Italian; it may be asked, whether will employ more time, he who directly studies these modern tongues, or he who first makes himself master of the Latin?—Besides, the modern languages would be purchased too highly at the expence of those years, which might be devoted to the acquisition of useful and important science.

Thus I have considered every argument in favor of classical learning, with which recollection and enquiry can supply me. If the observations and reasoning contained in this essay be true and conclusive, classical learning should have no place in a system of general education.—Where would be the loss or disadvantage? As all branches of knowledge cannot be taught in the years devoted to the instruction of youth, the preference ought to be given to the most useful and important. But classical learning has no connection with the primary object of a good education: the knowledge of facts, and habits of reasoning. Its connection with the secondary object, the communication of ideas in the best manner, is slight and distant: there are many other paths, which lead more directly and certainly to the same end.—Philosophy demands loudly and boldly the time, which prescription has given it.—The mind struggles to be free from its trammels, that it may range over the instructive and pleasing field of nature.

Let parents, then, reflect what is actually gained by their children, during the years devoted to the classics; and, what might have been gained. In an affair so important to the future welfare and usefulness of their children, as education certainly is, let them not permit the authority of great names, and the example of the world, to have the least influence or direction. The arguments of all let them attentively hear, and impartially

weigh. Let them even permit authority, prescription, and example, to turn the scale in favor of classical literature, if the arguments on each side be exactly poised.—But, let not authorities, though deemed the most sacred and high; let not prescription, though its origin be concealed in the gloom of antiquity; let not example, though ever so prevalent and extensive, rule over your judgment with despotic sway, and direct you in the pursuit of the improvement, utility, and welfare of your children.—The cause of truth demands and deserves your consideration; consider it, till conviction produce a correspondent plan of education.

THE END.

BRITISH MUSEUM 4 00 70